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BRIEFING PAPER

Famine defeated

Southern Africa, UN win battle against drought

Introduction — *For a continent regularly buffeted by famine, the story of the successful battle against a drought that seemed certain to claim hundreds of thousands of lives in Southern Africa needs to be widely known,* ***writes Salim Lone****. This success, engineered by the world's poorest and most crisis-ridden continent, also has a particularly special meaning at a time when Africa is seen, even by some of its own people, as a helpless continent unable to manage its day-to-day affairs, let alone handle a highly complex relief effort spread across a whole region.*

In May 1992, Mr. Jan Eliasson, head of the UN department coordinating humanitarian operations, said "the drought ravaging Southern Africa was now the worst in living memory." Commentators warned it could rival the one that gripped Ethiopia and Sudan in 1984-85 and claimed half a million lives. Total food output in 1992 was less than half that of the previous year. Four million tons of food aid needed to be rapidly sought from donor countries, to help feed about 20 million affected people spread over 2 mn square miles in the 10 SADC countries. Emergency non-food needs totalled over $200 mn. The Wall Street Journal *wrote that "the question isn't whether there will be a calamity but whether it will last one or two years."*

There were worries beyond widespread human suffering. As UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Botswana President Sir Ketumile Masire said in a joint statement

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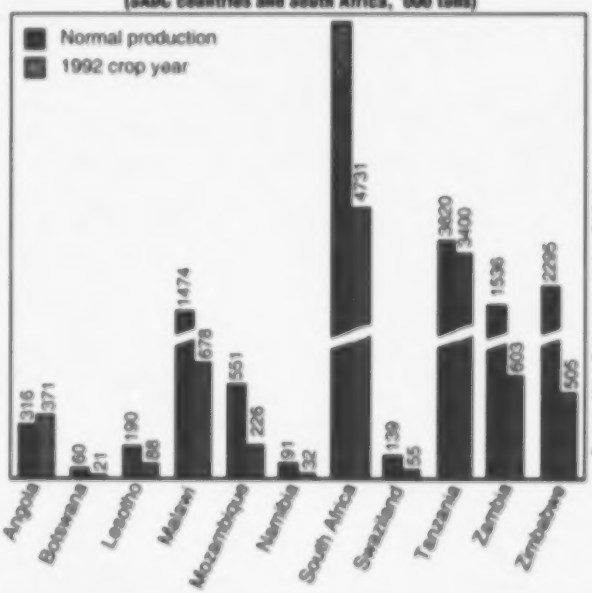
By Carole Collins

In 1992-93 Southern Africa was hit by the worst drought in a century. Yet, the threat of disastrous famine and countless deaths did not materialize thanks to remarkable collaboration between the region and the international community.

Thirty per cent of the region's 121 million people were affected by the drought in 1992. Over 20 million of the most vulnerable people in the 10 nations that make up the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) were at risk of starvation or disease, and at least 1 million in South Africa. When seasonal rains failed in late 1991 and early 1992, harvests dropped 30 to 80 per cent below normal across the region, a steeper fall than in the Horn of Africa in 1984-85. Zimbabwe's total 1992 cereal production dropped over 70 per cent below the previous five years' average. Namibia, almost self-sufficient in food the year before, lost 80 per cent of its maize harvest. Large numbers of livestock and wildlife, a source of emergency food in times of crisis, died of starvation or thirst.

Cereal production
(SADC countries and South Africa, '000 tons)



Yet a massive inflow of almost $1 bn in food and funding — the product of the first-ever famine relief appeal issued jointly by the UN and a regional body, SADC — kept mass starvation at bay. The

Carole Collins, who was based in Southern Africa from 1985 to 1990, has written extensively on African issues. *Africa Recovery wishes to thank Mercedes Savagues of WFP's Zimbabwe Office and Carol B. Thompson, Senior Research Associate at the University of Zimbabwe, for their assistance with this paper.*

Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), created in December 1991 by the UN General Assembly just as the drought began, took on an unprecedented coordinating role in mobilizing donors. Extensive logistical cooperation between SADC and the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), combined with the efforts of governments, other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), proved key in moving food from coastal ports to the people — scattered across 2.6 mn square miles — who desperately needed it.

SADC's 10-year experience in coordinating and improving regional links was vital in the successful battle against drought.

The region's comparative economic strength and self-reliance, coupled with an effective drought early warning system and SADC's 10-year experience in coordinating and improving regional transport and communications, were crucial factors in this remarkable success story. "To a large extent, the region relied on its own resources and looked to the outside world — the World Food Programme, the United Nations, and donors — for targeted food aid and other needs," noted Mr. Roger Buckland, a technical advisor to SADC's Harare-based food security unit. Zimbabwe, the hardest hit by the drought, bought all but 15 per cent of its emergency food needs through commercial channels.

Sarah Jane Poole

Dwindling water supplies threatened people's survival as much as lack of food.

This happened despite the region's vulnerability to food insecurity as a result of agricultural policies that encouraged farmers to grow higher-priced non-food cash crops; economies weakened by the current global downturn and declining export earnings; and poverty, which made the almost 60 per cent of rural people across the region living below the poverty line especially vulnerable to drought. The drought struck as millions of people were already suffering from chronic emergency conditions due to conflicts in Angola and Mozambique. The conditions — part of the cumulative effects of some 15 years of South African-contrived regional destabilization and war — had generated large refugee flows, including a million Mozambicans forced to flee to safety in Malawi, which neighbouring countries had to feed.

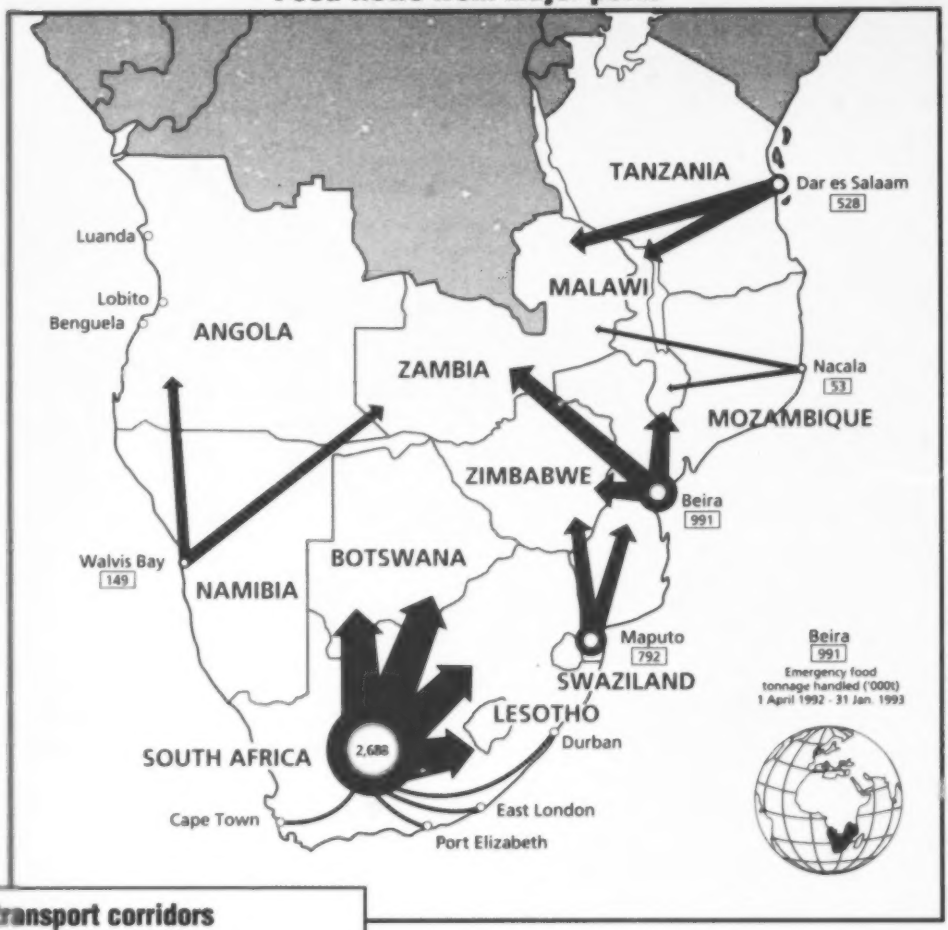
While famine was averted — with few if any direct deaths from starvation outside pockets of war-torn Angola and Mozambique — the drought still exacted a heavy toll on people's livelihoods. As rivers and reservoirs dwindled, water scarcity emerged as a threat to people's survival equal to lack of food. Thousands of people did die due to diseases linked to lack of water. "Cholera was endemic after 1987 in Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi, but with the drought it spread and increased throughout the region," noted Dr. Alessandro Loretti, Southern Africa Programme Coordinator for the World Health Organization (WHO). Major cholera outbreaks were reported in Angola and Zambia, and to a lesser extent Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Lack of water caused massive livestock losses, as well as deteriorating urban sanitation and forced water rationing in cities like Zimbabwe's Bulawayo. Factories and mines were forced to close or to reduce production, resulting in lost wages and rising unemployment. Many schools and hospitals also had to close, unable to operate without water.

Impressive achievement

The drought challenged the resources and ingenuity of the region's peoples and the international community. Both responded to the challenge with a creative and determined effort which generated impressive achievements:

- In the largest such effort ever in Africa, 11.6 million tonnes of drought-related commodities (cereals, non-cereals and fertilizer costing some $4 bn) were imported into the region between 1 April 1992 and 30 April 1993. This was over five times the average annual flow of food imports into the region — and five times the amount of food shipped to the Horn of Africa during its 1984-85 famine — and was achieved without critically disrupting transport of other essential imports.

Food flows from major ports



Source: Africa Recovery from SADC, Logistics Advisory Centre data

• Despite an ongoing war, Mozambique's port of Beira — which anchored the key road and railway corridor for transporting food to Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe — surpassed South Africa's larger and more modern port of Durban in handling increased food imports for these three landlocked SADC members. The outstanding performance by Beira and Maputo was the fruit of SADC's investment during the 1980s in upgrading outdated port facilities and regional road and railway infrastructure. This upgraded regional system and a dynamic local private sector made it unnecessary for relief agencies to set up an extensive logistical system to ensure food deliveries, as was done in Somalia.

Areas served by transport corridors

Corridor	Ports	Countries served by corridor
Northern	Dar es Salaam	Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia
Eastern I	Nacala	Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia
Eastern II	Beira, Maputo	Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Southern	Cape Town, Durban E.London, P.Elizabeth	Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe,
Western I	Walvis Bay	Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia
Western II	Benguela, Lobito	Angola

• When Malawi faced a severe food shortage in 1992, other SADC members joined UN agencies and donors in quickly diverting food from reserves or from shipments already in transit, averting a potentially tragic crisis. Priority was given to Malawi-bound shipments. World Bank concessional funding financed a third of Malawi's commercial maize imports, which helped stabilize prices in the local market and avoid further economic strains.

In the past, governments and agencies have tended to think of emergencies as quite separate from development. Southern Africa's drought emergency has created new institutions, new thinking and a new debate about how such emergencies can be better managed to minimize their impact on the environment and long-term development. While the distribution of seeds and other inputs has led to a rebound in production in most countries this year, the lingering effects of the drought will be felt in the region for months and even years to come. Governments, agencies and NGOs are still working to counter the drought's devastating effects on non-food agriculture and more long-term dimensions of the region's societies — on education, health care, industrial production, trade. Southern Africa's drought emergency experience — of what works and what can be improved — is already providing a wealth of lessons for the 1994 World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction.

Early warnings

In late 1991 and early 1992, SADC's Early Warning System (EWS) noted that reports of poor or erratic rains had begun to surface across the region. Like much of the continent, Southern Africa is subject to recurrent drought over 50-year cycles. Rains normally

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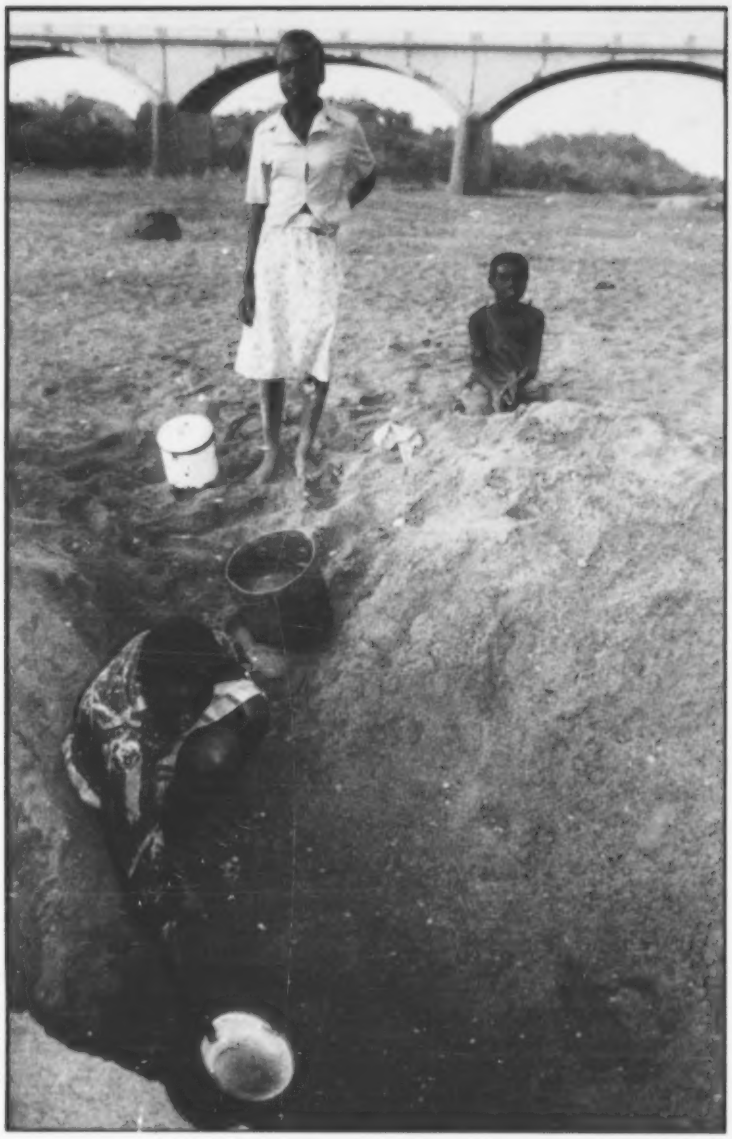


Sarah-Jane Poole

Children dig for water in the dry bed of the Runde River in Zimbabwe.

arrive in Southern Africa around October and last into February; most food crops are harvested in April-May and must be used to feed people until the next harvest the following year. After a high rainfall peak in 1980, much of the region suffered from sporadic or scant rainfall over the next decade. But late 1991 rainfall data indicated a threat of region-wide drought far greater than anything experienced before.

Many countries in the region have been self-sufficient in food. South Africa and Zimbabwe normally produce a surplus for export; Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia occasionally. But the region's food security is highly dependent on rain-fed production by peasant farmers, which is highly vulnerable to drought. Nearly all irrigated production is by larger commercial farmers, most of whom find it more profitable to produce cash crops for export than to cultivate food for local consumption.

Several external factors also made the region more vulnerable to the effects of drought than it would otherwise have been. Many of the region's economies remain highly integrated with and dependent on South Africa, despite SADC's steady progress in promoting economic self-reliance. Pretoria worked actively to destabilize its black-ruled neighbours economically and militarily between 1975 and 1990, striving to increase the dependency of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mozambique on its modern railway and port system — and then hindering their full use of it during past droughts or other economic emergencies. This compounded such normal problems of underdevelopment as limited road networks in Lesotho, an ageing truck fleet and limited railway freight capacity in Zimbabwe, and crumbling rural roads in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Brutal and highly destructive conflicts in Angola and Mozambique seriously disrupted food production and harvesting in both countries. Prior to the 1992 drought, Mozambique was producing only half of the food it required, and one-third of its 16 million people depended on food handouts to survive. Until a peace accord took effect in October 1992, 60 per cent of Mozambique's food aid required armed convoys to ensure delivery.

Over a decade and a half, SADC members suffered sizeable losses from direct South African attacks, economic sabotage or the opportunity costs of being forced to spend so much on national defence. A UN Economic Commission for Africa study estimates such costs totalled about $60 bn between 1980 and 1988, equal to twice the region's annual gross domestic product (GDP), or 20 times all US foreign aid to Southern Africa over the last decade. SADC countries were also forced to shoulder the economic burden of caring for over 2 million of Africa's 5.13 million refugees, most of whom fled the anti-civilian violence inflicted by South Africa and its proxy movements in neighbouring states.

The drought began just as SADC members, weakened by the global economic downturn, were struggling to cope with declining export earnings and the lingering effects of the dramatically higher oil import prices of the 1990 Gulf crisis. Many — including Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe — had adopted structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) at the urging of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other aid donors. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, where the programmes were in their early phase, living costs, especially for food, were

already rising, while public sector employment and government spending levels were in decline. This had the effect of making many low-income people even more vulnerable to the impact of the drought.

Donor policies had also weakened regional food security, worsening the drought's ultimate impact. Cuts in consumer food subsidies, increasingly a condition of donor aid, led to food price rises which, combined with trade liberalization measures, enabled the US and European Community to dump surplus food in the region, undercutting local farmers. Donors also pressured Zimbabwe, traditionally an exporter of food to the region, to cut high food-storage costs by selling much of its grain reserves. Its mid-1991 decision to sell the bulk of its 1.1 million tonne grain reserve ultimately proved to be disastrously timed. Zimbabwe's decision to honour its grain export contracts despite failing harvests in early 1992 sparked higher food prices. It eventually had to import grain commercially at a cost three times what it earned from selling its stockpile.

Estimates of the severity and scale of the drought, combined with these factors, soon raised fears that this resource-rich and normally food self-sufficient region might well lose many of its post-independence economic and social gains. Without sufficient outside help, some feared the drought could trigger a crisis, pushing the region's economies into long-term stagnation and decline.

Scale and impact of the crisis

Drought is a complex and unfolding process rather than an event. The rustle of dry, sun-bleached maize stalks soon extended across the region, testimony to lost harvests. Dead cattle and sheep began to litter rural areas. Most family herds — a source of wealth and of food in hard times — were wiped out, or so emaciated by lack of grass and leaves and water that they fell easy prey to disease.

As it worsened, the drought seriously affected local economies and people's lives beyond the immediate lack of food. In Zimbabwe and southern Zambia, rural schools and clinics closed due to lack of water. Some students became too weak to study or to walk to school from homes several miles away. Cholera and other water-related diseases rapidly spread, especially among refugee populations. In some areas, people left the parched countryside for towns in search of food, or sent rural children to live with relatives in cities. Crowds of shoppers in Zimbabwe and Zambia fought over the dwindling food supplies on store shelves. Power cuts due to reduced water levels of the Zambesi river darkened homes and forced factories to close in Zambia and Zimbabwe, leaving many jobless.

Women are the mainstay of household food security in Southern Africa, growing 80-85 per cent of the region's food crops. They mostly depend on subsistence farming and informal sector activities to feed themselves and their families. Many in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland also shoulder the primary responsibility of feeding children and the elderly when their menfolk migrate to work, often for years, in South African mines and factories. Women bore the brunt of the drought's legacy of shrivelled crops, slashed income, growing ill-health, and added hours spent foraging for scarce water, food and firewood.

NGOs play a major role

While the role of NGOs varied from country to country, they played a major part in responding to the regional drought. In most countries, they were largely responsible for targeted food distribution to vulnerable groups, emergency water and sanitation activities, aid to displaced people and activities supporting agricultural recovery. In Zambia, they assumed primary responsibility for distributing food relief to villagers. Their greater flexibility in reacting to the drought and "demonstrated capacity to adapt their existing development programmes to new emergency requirements," notes DHA, "was without question a critical component in averting loss of life."

"The drought experience demonstrated to governments that the grassroots participation of NGOs was in certain circumstances better suited to cope with the distribution of food aid," noted Mr. Stan Matindike, director of Zimbabwe's National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (NANGO). The growing prominence of NGOs has both reflected and reinforced the trend toward democratization in the region.

Swaziland relied on both local and international NGOs to respond to the drought. "It was a new thing in Swaziland to use NGOs to identify beneficiaries and distribute food," said Ms. Louise Sobon, the WFP operations director in Mbabane. "NGOs kept out of politics, theft and corruption," she added.

In Malawi, NGOs happened to be concentrated in central and southern regions where the need was greatest and were significantly strengthened by their drought work. "NGOs were key to the success of the operation," noted WFP's Lilongwe-based Drought Adviser Mr. Charlie Clarke, adding that "there was an awakening of the government as to the financial and executing role of NGOs and an awakening of the NGOs as to how the government machinery works." A July 1993 workshop has explored how to strengthen Malawian NGOs' capacity to deal with future emergencies, including how to design information systems and better target the most vulnerable.

On both regional and national levels, the scale of the drought's impact was immense:

- Thirty per cent of Southern Africa's 121 million people were directly affected by the drought. Of

more than 20 million seriously affected people in SADC, about 3.5 million faced starvation or severe malnutrition, especially in war-ravaged Mozambique and refugee-swollen Malawi.

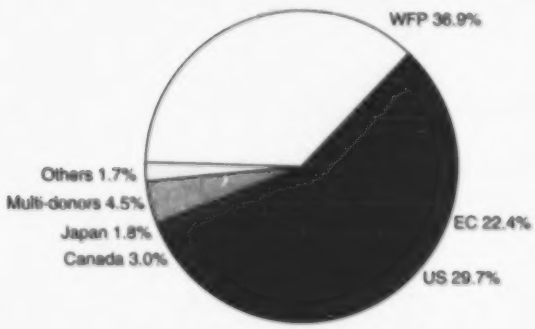
The changed political situation in South Africa allowed unprecedented cooperation between Pretoria and SADC in transporting food.

• SADC's 1992 regional cereal harvest was over 40 per cent lower than in 1991. Zimbabwe and South Africa lost 70 per cent of their food crops, Namibia almost 80 per cent. 11.5 mn tonnes of grain had to be imported to feed drought victims in the region's 11 countries — a five-fold increase over normal food import levels.

• Much of the region's livestock died, and 50 to 60 per cent of the region's wildlife — an important emergency food reserve for rural people during droughts — may have been lost as well, seriously affecting the region's tourism industry, an important source of foreign exchange, further reducing national revenues.

• Zimbabwe's marketed maize in 1992 was only 6 per cent of its normal level. Small farmers were the hardest hit: their crop failure was estimated at 92 per cent. Roughly half of its 10 million people — and 76 per cent of its rural population — needed drought relief. Zimbabwe's manufacturing industry, which normally draws 50 per cent of its inputs from agriculture, sharply declined. The loss of most of the irrigated sugar beet crop decimated production of ethanol, an important additive to petrol, generating fuel shortages and higher oil import costs. Water shortages forced mines to close.

Sources of food aid



Source: Africa Recovery based on FAO data.

Rapid responses

Just as complex as the drought was the regional response to the emergency. The multiplicity of tasks facing governments, donors, international agencies and NGOs in Southern Africa was daunting: to determine local and national food needs, stocks and expected shortfalls; to plan and negotiate shipping arrangements for emergency food imports; to find domestic or external financing for those imports; to monitor food shipments to regional ports able to accommodate them on top of normal import and export flows; to organize food deliveries to landlocked nations across the region, using major transport corridors more used to handling exports than imports; to transport food to local communities despite limited trucks and fuel and often crumbling roads; and to set up and operate an extensive network of food distribution programmes — including supplemental feeding for children and food-for-work schemes for adults — to ensure people did not starve.

On the plus side was an effective regional coordinating body, responsive donors, and UN agencies and NGOs well-placed and ready to respond. The changed political situation in South Africa since 1990 also helped, by allowing unprecedented cooperation between Pretoria and its SADC neighbours in facilitating food transport. That South Africa was also facing its most severe food crisis ever, with the loss of more than 70 per cent of its grain harvest, makes the success of the regional response even more impressive.

Regional responses

Governments in the region quickly grasped the massive scale of projected harvest losses and food shortfalls, thanks in great part to SADC's food security programme and early warning system. As the drought deepened in early 1992, SADC members began setting up national drought emergency committees. At SADC's January 1992 annual meeting in Maputo, member states asked the Zimbabwe-based SADC Food Sector Security Coordinator to assess expected food shortages, design a common regional response, and convene a donors' conference to elicit essential assistance. At an April meeting on the drought in Lusaka, SADC agriculture and transport ministers moved to create three new institutions for combating the drought:

- a regional drought task force,
- a regional centre for coordinating regional transport of emergency food, and
- task forces to oversee operation of each major transport corridor in the region.

The ministerial-level *Regional Drought Task Force (RTF)* was established to set SADC policy on the

drought, oversee regional emergency efforts and liaise with key UN departments and agencies — including DHA, WFP and UNICEF — playing central roles in providing emergency aid to affected countries. Early on, the RTF approved a first-ever official meeting with South Africa to coordinate transport of SADC-bound food through its four major ports — Cape Town, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth. This proved vital in ensuring smooth delivery of food to SADC's landlocked members. Over one-third of all food imports (commercial and aid) to landlocked SADC countries was shipped through South Africa. A Grain Operation Control Centre in Johannesburg, politically inconceivable a year earlier, allowed railway officials from South Africa and SADC states to resolve logistical bottlenecks.

The *Logistics Advisory Centre (LAC)* in Harare was set up jointly by SADC and WFP to provide working links between regional governments, UN agencies providing and distributing food or financing, other donors, food contractors and transport operators. Funded primarily by the US as well as by the Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, the UK, Luxembourg and the African Development Bank, LAC played a vital role in the successful drought response. Its weekly shipping bulletin contained up-to-date information on all drought-related shipments (commodities, volume, destination port, arrival and discharge dates), as well as any shortfalls and further food import needs. Obtaining, checking and collating this vast amount of information (more than 1,000 consignments with 25,000 information elements) involved LAC in daily contact with 12 major regional ports, railways, shippers and donors, noted Ms. Mercedes Sayagues of WFP's Harare office.

LAC also worked to identify and eliminate bottlenecks and to facilitate the flow of commodities to assist regional recovery. It acted as a channel for funds to quickly buy or lease essential equipment, install communication and signalling systems and repair damaged railway cars and tracks, all essential for maintaining the regional railway system on which more than 85 per cent of food to landlocked countries passed. LAC also helped buy stacking machines, tarpaulins, weighing scales, radios and facsimiles and repair or maintain bridges and roads. UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Eliasson described LAC as "an excellent example of the United Nations collaborating with regional resources."

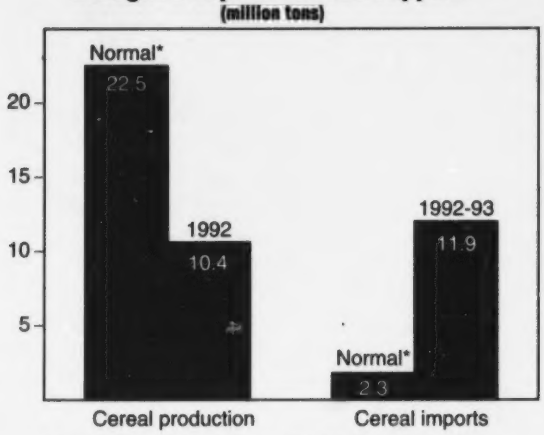
SADC acted as the secretariat for *Transport and Logistics Committees* —made up of port authorities, shippers and freighters, trucking firms and other businesses — set up for each of the region's six major transport corridors (see table, page 3). These "corridor groups" closely liaised with the LAC to overcome a number of transport bottlenecks and ensure food was delivered as quickly as possible. Each worked to maximize the import and delivery of food supplies, while maintaining existing cargo flows along a particular corridor, and provided regular information to LAC and SADC. Their link to SADC proved vital in reaching regional agreement on longer operating hours at border crossings, standardized customs charges for heavy-goods vehicles, revised cross-border procedures to minimize delays (such as conducting joint inspection of relief vehicles), common inspection standards and documentation procedures, and other cross-border issues.

World Food Programme/Mercedes Sayagues

Unloading food aid supplies in Angola. Civil war made the task of distributing food more difficult.

The Southern Africa region benefited from the existence of professional and experienced marketing boards, with good warehouse facilities. Coupled with a dynamic private sector in many parts of the region, this reduced the number of actors importing food and other essential supplies, and made the task of coordination easier. The relief operation presented an impressive example of effective public and private sector, as well as international cooperation.

Drought's impact on food supplies
(million tons)



* Average of previous five years. Totals include South Africa.
Source: Africa Recovery based on FAO data.

UN responses

DHA not only mobilized timely donor assistance but also played an important role for SADC, according to Mr. Buckland: "It was a vehicle to reach other UN agencies and NGOs; it put in place a common reporting mechanism through UNDP at country level and the information was then pooled at regional level; it put together information from different sectors (food aid, health, etc.) that would have been hard or time-consuming to obtain from each source."

Once SADC determined its regional response, DHA quickly joined it in launching their first-ever consolidated emergency appeal, for the Drought Emergency for Southern Africa (DESA). At a June 1992 meeting in Geneva, they asked donors for $854 mn, including 1.6 mn tonnes of targeted food aid and 2.5 mn tonnes of programme food aid, and subsequently issued monthly reports on the status of the appeal. While some donors responded to the crisis as early as April (and the US as early as December 1991), most began fully mobilizing support for the region following the official appeal. Close to $600 mn was quickly pledged and sizeable amounts of aid began arriving by September-October 1992. The appeal was subsequently increased to $951 mn, of which $708 mn, or 74 per cent, had reportedly been received or pledged by June 1993. By mid-1993, about 75 per cent of both targeted and programme food aid requests for the region had been delivered or were in the pipeline, according to DHA's final June 1993 report on the drought emergency (see table, opposite page). However, only 34 per cent of the $223 mn in non-food aid requests, including funds to expand water resources and transport food aid, were met.

For most people, family ties are the first line of defence against hunger. But the severity of the drought stretched even this social safety net.

As well as its role in LAC,WFP was a key player in channelling the bulk of targeted and programmed food aid to the region, handling close to 90 per cent of contributions given in response to the drought emergency. By keeping supply lines flexible, WFP was able to quickly divert shipments and borrow from existing stocks as needed, as it did extensively to deal with Malawi's temporary crisis. It also played an important role within countries in delivering food. In Swaziland, it kept food flowing to those in need by borrowing supplies from the commercial sector, a unique innovation.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) joined WFP in conducting multiple crop and food assessment missions which revealed early the enormity of the food crisis facing SADC members, and provided technical assistance to strengthen the region's early warning capabilities. It has provided seeds and other inputs on an emergency basis to several countries to restart food production and worked to rehabilitate livestock herds as a source of animal traction needed for farming.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) played a central role in coordinating UN agencies' responses in each country with that of governments, NGOs and donors and in collecting data on the drought for DHA. It joined SADC and DHA in sponsoring a September 1992 regional workshop on disaster management training at which SADC officials and representatives of member countries prepared emergency plans to strengthen national disaster response capabilities. It has also provided funds and technical assistance to help Botswana computerize its data on local drought activities, to assist Lesotho in studying drought effects on household welfare, to strengthen NGOs' capacity to implement drought relief in Malawi, and to help Namibia formulate policies for disaster mitigation.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) played a major role in supporting supplementary feeding for children, reaching over one million children in Zimbabwe alone at the height of the drought. It spent about $30 mn on drought-related activities up to June 1993 and also initiated emergency nutrition programmes and provided survival kits and agricultural packages to villagers to help restart food production.

UNICEF also funded many vital non-food emergency needs and activities not covered by other donors, including vaccines for immunization drives, water projects, transport vehicles, and medical supplies for food-for-work programmes. Donors responded unevenly to UNICEF, as well as to other agencies' appeals for non-food aid: drought-related requests for Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho were fully met, while UNICEF received virtually nothing for Angola and only a small fraction of estimated needs for Namibia. WHO worked with UNICEF in Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania and several other countries to ease the effects of the drought on the health sector.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR) played a vital role in sustaining not only the region's many refugees, often overlooked by officials during emergencies, but also many communities hosting them. UNHCR food stocks already in place were drawn on to fill urgent shortfalls elsewhere, as in Malawi, and later replenished. UNHCR also provided many Mozambican refugees with seeds, hoes and other resources to enable them to quickly resume food production once able to return to their country. The United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) joined UNHCR, local governments and NGOs in Zimbabwe and Malawi in efforts to help refugee women, one of the most vulnerable groups.

The World Bank allocated over $345 mn in quick-disbursing funds during the first half of 1992 to enable governments to respond quickly to the emergency. In Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe it also reallocated over $55 mn to finance drought activities other than food aid, such as expanding water supplies and providing agricultural inputs for farmers to grow food once the rains returned. Its complex tender procedures, however, slowed disbursement of funds it had allocated, sometimes creating hardships for companies awaiting payment and communities needing help. The Bank was fairly flexible in agreeing to relax many SAP requirements and targets, allowing, for example, slower introduction of scheduled price rises for mealie-meal.

National responses

Responses by countries in the region were highly creative and diverse. Botswana, a mostly desert country, was experienced in responding to food emergencies even before the rains failed in 1991-92. Because drought recurs so frequently, its government has incorporated disaster mitigation and rehabilitation features into its national development plans for many years. It set up several permanent institutions, including its own inter-ministerial drought committee, national early warning system and local district-level drought committees, to quickly respond to the threat of drought. As the SADC coordinator for agricultural research, its Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research has done extensive work on producing drought-resistant seeds for cereals and sharing this expertise regionally

Angola and Mozambique already had extensive emergency food delivery systems in place — involving both governmental and NGO structures — because of the ongoing war in many of their provinces (indeed, the threat of famine speeded peace negotiations in Mozambique). What drought-related deaths there were in the region occurred largely in Mozambique, where six of 10 provinces lost virtually their entire food crop. In Namibia, UN agencies actively participated in designing and managing the national relief effort along with the national drought task force.

Zambia, lacking a permanent emergency distribution system, had to start from scratch in developing an effective drought response. It developed an innovative strategy using NGOs to deliver food to local villages which proved unique in the region in mobilizing community resources. Swaziland also relied heavily on NGOs to feed almost 50 per cent of its total population, and plans to use an NGO network to help fund micro-projects aimed at alleviating environmental damage caused by the drought.

Zimbabwe, the strongest economy in the region after South Africa, was the hardest hit by the drought: over half its population of 10 million was seriously affected. The major part of drought relief went through government structures and in 1992 Zimbabwe spent almost 10 per cent of its GDP on famine relief. In July 1992, it introduced supplementary feeding schemes that by the end of the year were nourishing over 1.2 million children under five with one hot meal, five days a week.

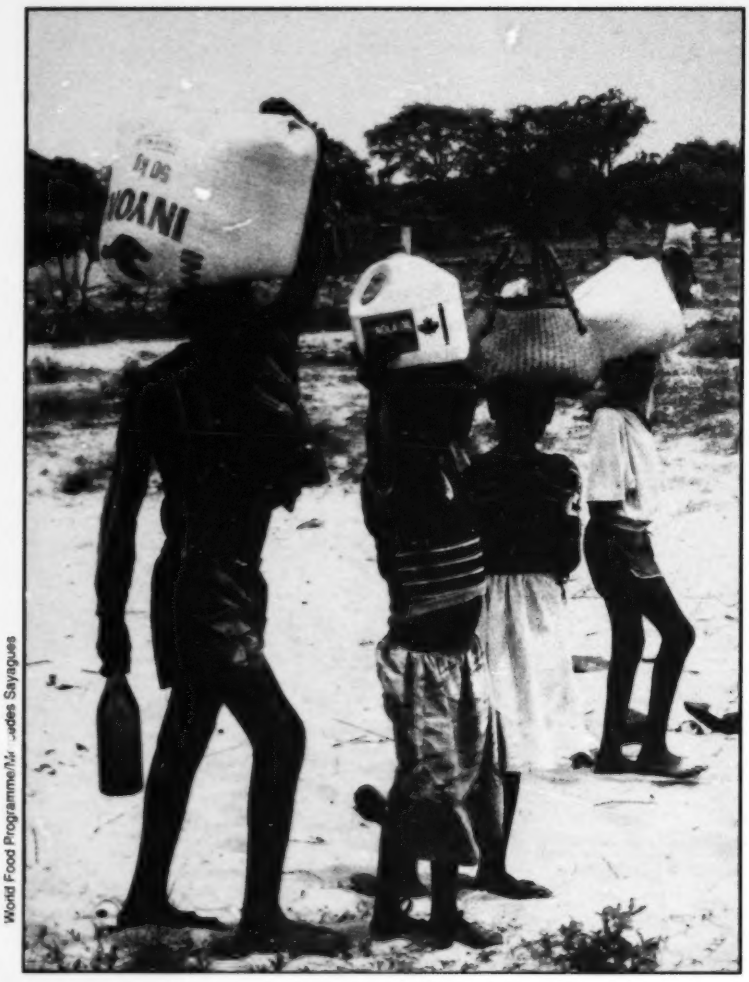
Grassroots responses

Coping mechanisms by drought-affected individuals and communities proved key to averting famine deaths. For most people, family ties are the first line of defence against hunger. But the severity of the drought stretched even this social safety net. Special drought measures such as household food subsidies or supplemental feeding of children generally covered only 30-40 per cent of a typical Zimbabwean family's caloric needs. Many in rural areas turned to eating wild fruits and tubers. In Zimbabwe's Masvingo province, people pulled ploughs in place of cattle which had died or were too weak. In some areas, commercial farmers invited

Donor pledges to SADC/UN appeal

	Target	Total	Shortfall
Angola	$89,599,000	$28,288,42	$61,310,575
Botswana	6,352,994	4,760,681	1,592,313
Lesotho	11,076,098	7,882,679	3,193,419
Malawi	224,507,790	197,886,557	26,621,233
Mozambique	248,527,320	236,815,560	11,711,760
Namibia	20,812,727	9,132,933	11,679,794
Swaziland	20,862,015	13,390,395	7,471,620
Tanzania	7,674,000	4,022,787	3,651,213
Zambia	91,974,872	53,006,506	38,968,366
Zimbabwe	208,058,977	130,040,957	78,018,020
Regional Projects	21,175,750	22,524,318	(1,348,568)
Total	**$950,621,543**	**$707,751,798**	**$242,869,745**

Source: UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs



World Food Programme/Ma...odes Sayagues

Children collect food aid in Mozambique.

neighbouring peasant farmers to graze their cattle on their land. In Swaziland, food distribution began in June 1992 — four months before food aid began arriving — thanks to local donations by schools, businesses, the Parliament, diplomatic missions and members of the Ghanaian community, among others.

Future prospects

In early 1993, rains returned to most of the region and by June the immediate food emergency was largely over. SADC's 1992/93 cereal harvest is estimated to be almost twice the size of the 1991/92 crop. Its 1993-94 cereal import requirements should drop by almost 60 per cent from 1992-93 levels, although about 40 per cent of regional cereal imports will still have to be made up of food aid due to foreign exchange shortages.

Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe expect above-average cereal harvests in 1993. Mozambique's 1993 cereal production is expected to be sharply above its average annual harvest between 1987 and 1991, despite the fact that five Mozambican provinces continue to face food deficits. Late or erratic rains have contributed to improved but still below-normal 1993 harvests in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland, delaying rural recovery. Where pockets of drought linger on, local communities will still require food aid until after the 1994 harvest, including almost three out of every 10 Mozambicans who received food aid in 1992-93, where lingering insecurity has continued to hamper deliveries of food aid, as well as renewed planting. In Lesotho, poor rains in some areas are forcing it to expand relief operations. Nearly 2 million Angolans will also require food aid in the coming year due to the deadly interaction of drought and continuing civil conflict.

Even in countries with good rains, the effects of the drought linger. In April, Zimbabwe reported most dams were replenished to only 60 per cent capacity, and Bulawayo area water sources were only 50 per cent full. Water-related public health problems, including cholera epidemics, have continued to affect people across the region, particularly those in refugee camps, and additional aid is needed to prevent further declines in rural and urban health standards. Many of the probable long-term environmental effects — in soil erosion, deforestation, loss of habitat — remain to be measured.

The drought's ripple effects have continued to slow recovery and dim development prospects. Many governments, forced to divert funds from development projects to food relief, exhausted their foreign exchange reserves. They now face rising budget deficits and foreign debt burdens. African governments and NGOs have suggested that debt relief may be the simplest and most cost-effective means of helping SADC nations pay the high costs of commercial food imports and inputs needed to help their economies and food production fully recover.

Rural communities are still suffering from decimated livestock herds and empty granaries. Insufficient seed supplies in parts of the SADC region and lack of agricultural implements and draught animals forced many small farmers to limit areas planted despite improved rainfall. Many students are still struggling to recover from having lost a year of schooling. Many of these lingering effects have received little attention or funding from donors, and most observers expect the region will take three to four years to fully recover.

Indeed, the most enduring legacy of the drought may be the greater poverty it generated across the region, where millions of people were reduced to bare survival, according to DHA's final situation report on the drought. The drought also generated greater social inequity, despite efforts to assist the poorest and most vulnerable groups in many countries. Part of the challenge to long-term recovery lies in tackling this pover-

ty and inequity, which excludes so many from enjoying the benefits of development.

Lessons from the drought

"The 1991-92 drought has provided a good learning experience," according to LAC's information officer Ms. Linda Manasa. "One can look back and see the mistakes that were made and use that experience to plan how to handle emergencies of this nature more efficiently." Governments and donors have begun to do this and to analyze the policy implications of drought's non-food dimensions. As UNICEF's Nairobi-based Regional Economic Adviser for East and Southern Africa, Richard Morgan, has pointed out, "During a drought, from the perspective of a child, health security and water security may be as

Drought's impact on Southern Africa

	Population (mn)	Pop. affected (mn)*	1992 GDP growth (%)*	Normal cereal production ('000t)**	1992 cereal production ('000t)	Normal cereal imports ('000t)**	Cereal imports 1992/93 ('000t)	of which food aid ('000t)	1993 cereal prod. ('000t)
Angola	10.3	1.4	4.5	316	71	328	370	205	321
Botswana	1.3	0.3	5.0	60	21	153	230	20	41
Lesotho	1.8	0.4	3.1	190	88	200	274	57	109
Malawi	8.8	6.1	-13.9	1,474	678	198	913	768	2,091
Mozambique	16.1	3.9	-1.4	551	226	507	1,218	1,147	742
Namibia	1.8	0.2	-1.1	91	32	69	116	36	81
Swaziland	0.8	0.4	2.8	139	55	47	137	46	86
Tanzania	25.3	0.6	-0.8	3,820	3,400	106	318	150	3,959
Zambia	8.4	1.7	-4.7	1,536	603	114	1,067	795	1,751
Zimbabwe	10.1	5.6	-9.5	2,295	505	100	2,103	678	2,417
SADC Total	84.7	20.6	—	10,472	5,679	1,822	6,746	3,902	11,598
South Africa	36.8	1.0	-1.5	12,000	4,731	467	5,200	—	9,100

Source: DHA, ECA, FAO, WFP, World Bank and government estimates * estimates ** average of previous five years

Introduction

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in May 1992, the drought could "also wreak havoc on the economic stability of several of the drought-affected states."

The feared famine never transpired. An exemplary tripartite effort, led by the African countries themselves and coordinated by the UN system, had averted the hundreds of thousands of deaths that seemed inevitable. SADC mobilized to battle the disaster with a speed unprecedented for such poorly-resourced countries. Early warning units had alerted the world to the looming famine at a very early stage, and FAO, with WFP, mounted multiple crop and food supply assessment missions covering all 10 countries within three weeks. The missions confirmed the enormity of the problem the region faced. The newly established Department of Humanitarian Affairs then prepared the UN system's first-ever Consolidated Emergency Appeal, as well as the first-ever famine relief appeal issued jointly by the UN and a regional body.

The donors, partly because they were pleased with the new unified appeals process initiated by the UN Secretary-General, responded immediately with food aid pledges covering virtually all that was needed, although the response to non-food aid was poor.

That was the easy part. In addition to the 4 million tons of emergency food imports for SADC countries, 5.2 million tons of cereals were required by South Africa as well. This meant that the region's transport infrastructure in 1992-93 had to handle an import load five times greater than normal.

But even this daunting challenge was met, as SADC countries mobilized for the international effort by giving it the highest political priority, with each one establishing a national drought relief coordinating body and ensuring that every governmental and parastatal unit needed for the relief effort — from ports and railways and other transport bodies, to medical, agricultural, water and immigration authorities — was committed to saving every life that it could. And, in pursuit of this goal, the transport ministers of SADC countries even took the then politically unpalatable step of meeting with their South African counterpart to ensure that that country's railroad infrastructure would also be mobilized for the region's food imports.

LESSONS LEARNED

The UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF and the World Food Programme have identified a number of important lessons from Southern Africa's recent experience with drought:

- Encourage farmers to diversify food crops to include traditional drought-resistant foods like cassava, millet and sorghum and reduce reliance on high-yielding cereal varieties that require perfect conditions for production.
- Maintain adequate maize supplies for the commercial market. Failure to do so generated political unrest in Malawi, boosted food prices on the parallel market, and disrupted feeding programmes for vulnerable groups.
- Ensure accurate registration and screening of aid recipients and the autonomy of food relief operations from local politics. Failing to do so inflated food aid registration lists in Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and denied aid to many of the most needy and vulnerable.
- Adapt drought response policies, programmes and structures to recognize and build on the significant role of local communities, families and especially women in mitigating the effects of drought.
- Promote rapid recovery of household food production, especially among small farmers, as an integral part of emergency response activities.
- Develop commodity tracking systems better able to track food movements and alert donors to food needs on a timely basis, so that food aid arrives when needed, and not after harvests have returned to normal as happened in Malawi.
- Place water security as a regional priority on a level with food security, since water scarcity may have cost more lives than lack of food during this drought.
- Decentralize operations as much as possible to ensure flexible and quick responses to changing conditions in the field.
- Actively address structural weaknesses in the health sector, including lack of adequate nutritional and epidemiological surveillance and data, which directly undermined the effectiveness of emergency programmes.
- Strengthen standby famine prevention and calamity mitigation structures in vulnerable countries to ensure the quickest response to future emergencies.
- Review and consider redesigning structural adjustment and related programmes so that they better protect vulnerable groups and speed the recovery of households and national economies suffering from the effects of drought and conflict.

crucial for survival as food security." DHA, calling the drought emergency response "one of the largest food import efforts in history," is currently exploring how to support the region's transition from relief to post-emergency recovery and to help build a permanent capacity for emergency response. The US Agency for International Development's Office of Food and Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has also initiated a disaster training programme for Southern Africa.

As DHA has noted, "it is essential that emphasis be placed on drought as a recurrent and long-term problem in Southern Africa with implications for economic policy and development objectives that extend well beyond the recent drought emergency." Governments and donors increasingly realize that in a region of recurrrent drought, plans for emergency response must be built into long-term development strategies. Hence governments and donors must address the need to develop greater regional food security, independent of global food supplies. They also need to find faster ways to help countries advance post-drought economic recovery. In September and October 1993, a SADC-wide regional conference and six national conferences are to explore how the lessons of this drought — and some of the structures and institutions developed to deal with it — can be incorporated into national economic development plans, and how emergency, recovery and development programmes can be better integrated.

As UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mr. Jan Eliasson has noted, "preparedness is clearly one of the keys to developing a structure which allows for the efficient delivery of assistance to drought-stricken countries. Disaster-prone areas should have available, not only the capacity to forecast impending natural disasters, but also the resources to react quickly and effectively when disaster does strike."

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